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## THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE SMALL HIGH SCHOOL

DAVID SNEDDEN

Commissioner of Education for Massachusetts, Boston

Dr. Thorndike has shown,<sup>1</sup> on the basis of the figures contained in the annual reports of the National Bureau of Education, that in the United States public secondary schools which have only one or two teachers are in excess of all the others; while in high schools having fewer than four teachers are enrolled over one-third of all the secondary-school pupils of the country. In Massachusetts, approximately 40 per cent of the high schools have fewer than four teachers.

From the standpoint of the colleges, and of many speakers at our larger educational gatherings, these small high schools may seem rather poor, understaffed, and generally ineffective institutions; but, looked at as the principal cultural agencies in somewhat sparsely settled regions, usually agricultural, where a considerable percentage of high-grade men and women are born and reared, they assume a large importance.

Rarely are these schools without a few pupils preparing for college. The teachers are apt to be recent college graduates, as yet unable to interpret education except in terms of college courses still fresh in memory. The college, through its entrance requirements, indicates detailed and definite standards to be met. Hence, quite naturally, the work of the small undermanned secondary school is customarily one long struggle to bring a limited number of boys and girls to the point of getting into college with some degree of credit. The test thus imposed on the faculty of the school is concrete and easily comprehended by the community. Teachers are judged by the success of their pupils in meeting the requirements of higher institutions. None of the other standards and ideals of secondary education, so often discussed in

<sup>1</sup> *Educational Review*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 245.

general, and so seldom in specific, terms at educational and kindred gatherings, have much weight with the small high school. Its teachers are of sheer necessity followers, not originators; and they have their hands full in seeking to meet the very specifically formulated requirements imposed by the colleges.

Thus restricted in its scope, it is undoubtedly true that the small high school has largely failed to serve as effectively as is ideally possible community needs as represented in the large majority of its pupils, for whom a higher education is out of the question. Naturally, high-school teachers, as well as college critics and examiners, do not admit this. Somewhere in the past originated the belief that for any and all persons certain abstract studies, such as algebra, Latin, ancient history, physics, and the like, possess an exceptional value in unfolding the powers of the mind and in developing or imparting that elusive quality called culture; on this belief the accepted curriculum rests. These studies play an important part, of course, as tools in higher education as usually organized; but that, in the shape which they ordinarily take when presented as means of college preparation, they should be assumed to have other kinds of educational utility, is one of the mysteries of contemporary educational thinking. Probably an explanation is to be found in the disposition of many persons to reason according to the principle of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Young people who have had these studies succeed better, as a rule, in the world than those who have not, whether judged by standards of material success or of cultural development. But in fact the pupils who pass well in a secondary-school program of abstract studies are ordinarily a picked lot, in respect to both inheritance and environment. They are those for whom culture and prosperity are, in a degree at least, inevitable, no matter what the school program may be. The conviction, however, is slowly spreading that the traditional program of the small high school is, for those who do not reach college, a relatively futile affair when viewed from the standpoint of any one of the three possible aims of secondary education, namely: vocational efficiency, civic capacity, and personal culture. There is a growing demand, often inarticulate, in communities supporting such schools, but finding more

definite expression in circles where these problems can be systematically studied, that the artificial restrictions imposed on general secondary education be relaxed, and that such education be measurably readjusted so as to serve more acceptably the actual needs of the community.

The response to this demand is, even now, partially felt. At first hesitatingly, then whole-heartedly, important institutions of higher education have modified their standards. They do not aim to lower their requirements, as expressed in the general ability of entrants to do good college work; but they manifest a wholesome disposition to let the high schools do their work in their own way and to accept the results, provided only the graduates of these schools will surely justify themselves in their ability to do serious and effective higher study. We may now hope that the time is forever past when colleges could harass secondary schools by their varying insistence on special topics, texts, or time-tables in algebra, French, chemistry, and other traditional subjects. The period during which the colleges nursed the high schools was doubtless necessary; but apron strings have been cut and our great institutions of higher learning are opening a new era by reposing increased confidence in the management of secondary schools.

As a consequence a heavy responsibility now devolves upon the public high school. It must define its true aims—a thing it has never done—and must work out a pedagogy of means and methods, toward which general subject a not uncommon attitude even yet is that of the farmer who, after carefully inspecting and feeling of the dromedary in the circus, muttered, “There ain’t no such animal.” Those responsible for the administration of the small high school must needs give especial attention to a determination of what is meant by community needs, on the one hand, and the educational possibilities of different groups of children of secondary-school age, on the other.

The present is an era of opportunity for the small high school. Let it recognize its necessary limitations; let it explore its possible field; let it undertake to realize its unquestionably great possibilities.

For the sake of calling forth discussion, and as a means of indi-

cating his own growing convictions, the writer wishes to support the following theses relative to an effective functioning of the small high school. They are not designed as a basis of plans and programs of action for the present, but as fragmentary contributions toward a theory of secondary education, which may eventually become the source of such plans and programs.

1. The small high school must remain primarily a school of liberal, as contrasted with vocational, education. Effective vocational training in any field is practicable only under specially prepared teachers, special equipment, and specially arranged conditions. Attempts at genuine vocational education in the small high school, as commonly organized, whether in agricultural, industrial, commercial, or household-arts subjects, are foredoomed to failure unless in fully specialized departments. Otherwise the so-called vocational training which results is likely to be a sham and an imposition.

2. On the other hand, every small high school should maintain work in one or more lines of practical arts, but avowedly with reference to the possible contributions of the subject to the valid ends of liberal or general education. Manual training, household arts, agriculture, and such commercial studies as typewriting and elementary bookkeeping can be made valuable factors in liberal education; they will also make incidental contributions to vocational ideals. But it is important that neither the community nor the pupil be deceived into thinking of any of these subjects, when pursued a few hours each week, as developing genuine vocational skill and capacity.

3. The small high school must recognize that preparation for college is, for a small but important minority of its pupils, a necessary and valuable function; but it must equally recognize that for a majority of its pupils preparation for the realities of the cultural and civic life of the local community is a supremely important purpose. It must learn in addition that, even in view of the greatly modernized college admission requirements now being developed, the two aims are not to be realized through the same means and methods. In the high school the future college student should learn the use of certain tools which the boy not going to college will not need.

4. Especially must the small high school learn to serve, and in growing measure as standards of living improve, the needs of a very large class of boys and girls hardly yet recognized in American secondary education—those, namely, who will, and probably should, leave school at or near the age of sixteen, the age at which, through all the periods of civilization, the vast majority of young people have begun serious participation in the vocational occupations of life.

5. The small high school, and it is to be hoped the large also, must learn that in the liberal education of young persons two quite different methods of approach are required as between different subjects, and often for the several phases of the same subject. Naturally, the provinces for the two types of methods shade into each other and sharp distinctions are undesirable even though for purposes of description they may be temporarily drawn.

The first type embraces those methods of teaching, the largest outcome of which is appreciation. The satisfaction of natural or induced curiosity, the nurture of the native instincts toward unforced growth in feeling and intelligence—these purposes should control in this phase of instruction. A child hears a story or song, reads a book for pleasure, makes an excursion with a friend, attends a good play or moving-picture show, visits a picture gallery, listens to an illustrated lecture on a scientific subject, the net results of which contacts are new accessions of resources of intellect and feeling, with perhaps little gain, relatively, of ability to organize, express, and apply the knowledge and sentiment thus developed. For lack of a better term, let us call the ends and methods here illustrated those of appreciation.

The second aspect of method appears when the definite purpose of teaching is the development of power toward execution of some sort. The study of a foreign language should result in ability to use it; of mathematics and science in advanced stages, in the ability to organize and apply to further pursuits the knowledge thus obtained. Any extensive development of cultural or civic power (to say nothing of vocational) requires the strenuous and purposeful mastery of what may be called intellectual tools, methods, and materials. This mastery can be achieved, as a rule, only when the

learner is in a willing or co-operative attitude. The high school of today, by its methods, seems, in all subjects, to aim mainly at power in execution or application, but its methods are as yet not consciously pedagogical, with the result that it finds in its pupils an absence of interest and an indisposition toward self-help.

Of the two approaches here contrasted, the first deliberately invokes and sustains the relatively spontaneous learning capacities, and organizes means and methods toward that end; while the second utilizes processes of learning that are relatively artificial. The average textbook in science presupposes the second rather than the first method. In fact, but a small part of high-school education, as organized, is directed to what is here called learning for appreciation. The unorganized activities of English and American secondary schools are, on the other hand, full of such spontaneous elements, though these are often not uplifting. A very real pedagogic difficulty in organized secondary education yet exists in the imperfect adjustment or in the lack of adjustment of the two kinds of training.

The writer believes that in the introductory stages, at least, of literature, general science, social science, and practical arts, when these subjects are designed for students likely to leave school early, the controlling end should be deep and varied appreciation; whereas in vocational subjects, in English expression, and in the later stages of science and mathematics, the controlling purpose should be power in application or execution. Until the distinction of method here suggested is developed, it seems unlikely that the small high school can do much for culture and social development as ends of secondary education. It should not be forgotten that much of what we vaguely call culture springs from the first method, and, perhaps, from it only, but only when interest and self-active effort are enlisted.

6. The small high school must recognize that with respect to the means and methods of stimulating interest and appreciation it has a relatively wide field, whereas in the matter of subjects and phases of subjects calling for power in application and execution its limitations are pronounced and besetting. Lectures on pictures, musical recitals, moving-picture presentations, good libraries,

excursions, participation in civic activities, interpretations of science by talks and readings, access to some phase of practical arts by means of participation on the amateur's level—all these may prove rich and easily accessible sources of culture. But mastery of a foreign language, systematic study of literary selections, drill in the arts of vernacular expression, laboratory exercise in science work, and productive effort in some field of the practical arts all require specialization of teaching power such as the small high school can only to a limited degree afford. In power-producing studies, as contrasted with appreciation-favoring opportunities, the small high school must restrict its field to what it can do well.

What, then, is the minimum curriculum a small high school can have and fairly meet the above ends? The writer believes that the following most nearly serves these purposes:

#### FIRST AND SECOND YEARS

##### Non-College-Preparatory

1. English literature
2. English language
3. General science
4. Social science
5. Practical arts

##### College-Preparatory

6. English literature
7. English language
8. Selected from 3-5
9. Mathematics
10. Foreign language

#### THIRD AND FOURTH YEARS

11. } Selected from
12. } college-preparatory
13. } courses
14. }
15. Practical arts

16. English literature
17. English language
18. Science
19. Foreign language
20. History

This proposed curriculum for the small high school presents two programs of study. The first is designed for youths not seeking college preparation, but intending to terminate their general education during or at the close of the high-school course; while the second is planned to provide adequate preparation for college work.

But a further distinction is apparent. The first two years' work of the high school is organized primarily to minister to the needs of those who will probably end their general education at or about sixteen, but on the assumption that a portion of such



work will also prove valuable for those who are probably destined for college. On the other hand, the last two years of the curriculum give prominence to considerations of college preparation, with the understanding that for the student who continues in school without intending to enter college the college-preparatory studies are sufficiently valuable, and in the small high school constitute the most effective provision that can be made. An analysis of the curriculum into its constituent elements will make this general distinction clearer. It will be understood that the dogmatic and direct form of presentation is rendered necessary by the space limitations of this paper.

1. The two-year course in English literature should be, in content and method of presentation, such as intelligent persons, solicitous as to the establishment of good tastes and standards of judgment in general reading, and acquainted with the strong interests and the general learning capacities of young adolescents, would design for youths who will probably terminate their liberal school education at or about sixteen years of age.

We do not yet know in detail what such a course should contain, nor have we much available knowledge of the methods that would be appropriate in its presentation. In this matter, our college professors of English may be able at present to give us but little help; and it may be doubted whether even high-school teachers of the subject, as now organized, with their established prepossessions, can give satisfactory guidance.

It may well be doubted whether the so-called English classics should figure largely in this course. It would appear self-evident that it should contribute to marked elevation of taste in the reading of contemporary literary productions, as found in newspaper, magazine, and book form. It would appear to be folly to endeavor to secure at large expense of time and energy, and with uncertain results, abiding interests in fields into which the large majority of fairly well-educated people do not habitually enter.

Furthermore, it may be questioned whether in this course literature should be at all closely correlated with the study of oral and written expression in the vernacular. The writer believes that careful study would show that in most American high schools

today the intimate correlation of language study and literature, such as prevails in the general subject called English, results neither in power of literary appreciation nor in capacity for effective expression. The two purposes require such different pedagogic methods that it may be doubted whether the same teacher should, as is usually the case in high schools, teach both subjects. At any rate in English designed solely "for life," literature and the arts of expression should receive independent consideration.

2. Language study, in this program, should, as contrasted with literature, where the controlling end is appreciation, be designed mainly to give power in the arts of expression in English, and on a level appropriate and practicable for the large majority who are to have no college training. Here again, few if any precedents exist. The pedagogy of the problem has not been studied because the problem itself has not been clearly differentiated and formulated.

3. After literature and expression in English, no subject has a more appropriate place in a program of liberal education designed primarily for persons destined probably to enter upon practical life at sixteen than general science. This science cannot be psychology, or botany, or zoölogy, or physiology, or physics, or chemistry, or geology, or astronomy, or geography, but should consist of large units or topics from several or all of those subjects, and all presented from the standpoint of appreciation and insight, as contrasted with power to use. Little organized material for teaching purposes in this field is yet available, and progress will be slow until there is developed a vital pedagogy of secondary-school teaching. In general, the science subjects contemplated should aim to interpret the significant phases of the material environment of the youth, so far as his capacity normally permits; and this process should produce large appreciation, permanent interests, and a measure of insight.

4. No less indispensable to the liberal education of American youth than general science is social science, meaning thereby that appreciative understanding of the social environment which is essential, not only to citizenship, but to effective living. For this subject neither content nor method is yet available. A certain amount of civics is, of course, found in American high schools. Increasing

attention has, in recent years, been given to history, but the advocates of that study in the secondary school have, as yet, been unable to show us how it actually "functions" in any kind of civic or social efficiency. Perhaps it is not intended to do so, but the other purposes, whatever they are, should be defined and proved valuable; otherwise the subject is in danger of being relegated to the museum of discarded educational machinery.

But whether our leaders in history teaching will have it so or not, those who can detach themselves from educational traditions and who are accustomed to face the facts of youth and society know that a two-years course constructed of suitable units from civics, economics, ethics, and other constituents of social science, enriched with vital and pertinent contributions from history, both that which is made and that which is today making, can be devised. They know, furthermore, that such a course, planned for youths from fourteen to sixteen, can be made to yield valuable contributions to moral and civic capacity, as well as to provide a background for future vocational studies. Teachers for this work are not yet available; nor are manuals and textbooks; but given the right conception of the pedagogic need and method, these things will soon follow.

5. The small high school cannot be a vocational school in any true sense of that word, but this does not mean that it shall forego all attempts to keep its boys and girls in contact with the practical arts by which men and women must live and which are therefore, like the earth beneath, the sky above, and the social life all about, among the great realities of life. That is no liberal education which ignores the possibilities that adolescence presents, of an illuminating and inspiring contact with those realms of achievement wherein men control the material world to the uses of humanity. In this general subject, contact and participation on the amateur's level are the essential basal elements of method.

Under practical arts we may recognize four distinct departments—namely, agriculture, the industries, the commercial occupations, and the household arts. A small high school can, even when articulating its work closely with similar work in the upper grades of the elementary school, carry but one or two of these

divisions. In a rural community agricultural and household-arts training might well comprise all the practical-arts work.

The controlling aim in this field should not be direct vocational skill or even knowledge designed to be applied in specific callings, but rather the broad, appreciative insight and sympathetic contact which will result in high standards of utilization and a measure of vocational idealism. Units of work, each leading to visible and serviceable achievement, should be made available for the youthful amateur's contact with human vocations; and these should constitute ports of embarkation for excursions into fields of related art, history, economics, science, and mathematics. It will be observed that the non-college-preparatory program contains, in the first two years, no mathematics, it being assumed that the needful mathematical practice for those leaving school at sixteen can be obtained in conjunction with the practical-arts work.

6-10. During the first two years of the high-school curriculum, students desiring to prepare for college should take mathematics and a foreign language; and also the two English branches and one other subject from the non-preparatory program. The study of mathematics and the foreign language should be designed to give direct power in the use of these subjects as tools in college work. The teaching should be intensive, the standards high, and, in mathematics at least, acquaintance with the methods of using the subject as an instrument should be made concrete, perhaps along lines suggested by the Perry movement in England. But to students probably not going to college it should be made clear that high-school mathematics, as the subject is customarily presented, has probably little educational value in comparison with other subjects which should be available.

11-14. During the third and fourth years of the curriculum, the small school under consideration can well afford to give its chief consideration to the minority (perhaps by this time a majority) of its pupils who contemplate study beyond the high school. But, if equipment and other facilities permit, boys and girls not seeking college preparation should have opportunity to supplement a program made up of selected studies from the preparatory list, with practical-arts courses. Conceivably these might be made to

assume the character required to produce vocational efficiency, in which, by a part-time or other arrangement, half the student's time might be given to practical and productive work in the calling selected, and a portion of the remainder to related technical studies. But this could be accomplished only through special teachers and modified internal organization of the school.

16-20. Third- and fourth-year preparatory subjects should, in content and method of presentation, follow lines adjudged sound by college authorities as means of college preparation. The foreign language begun in the first year is here continued with a view to giving a genuine mastery of that subject; English, as a study of literature and of the arts of expression, is pursued intensively; while science and history are also so taught as to produce power in using these subjects as instrumentalities.

In this connection attention should be called to the preposterous attempts on the part of small high schools to teach two or more foreign languages. Seldom have such schools the means of teaching one at all adequately; but it is unbelievable that so many of them should palm off on the public so-called Latin, French, and German teaching which is not even a fair imitation of language teaching according to any adequate standard. Let the small high school never attempt more than one foreign language; let it teach that intensively through four years; let it permit no pupil to continue in the subject who has not real capacity for it; and, incidentally, let the school obtain as a teacher of this subject one who knows something about it—if a modern language, one who can understand and use it. Americans are hospitable to shams, and yield to self-delusion in education as in other matters; but in no other respect are we so much imposed upon as in the high-school teaching of foreign language.

The foregoing hypothetical organization of a high-school curriculum is presented with a view to eliciting discussion and constructive suggestion. It cannot be regarded as a program of action for the present time—it contains too many features which are yet ill defined and in need of experimental demonstration. The writer hopes that within the next few years considerable progress will be made in testing particular phases of this and similar plans.

Already, indeed, there are many enterprising and careful teachers who are seeking to reorganize special subjects. General science suited to the first and second high-school years—have we not already some foreshadowings of possible courses in this field? Here and there are English teachers who are feeling their way toward a fuller and richer utilization of the world's store of reading-matter as a means of developing genuine culture in the case of youths of fifteen or sixteen years of age. Even in the ill-defined field above called social science, we have examples of the teaching of civics, of local economics, of industrial history, and of ethics, a development of the historic sense, and a kindling of social ideals, which show what may eventually be done in a broad program of the wider civic or social education.

Can the small high school carry out the proposed program? It is certainly not more pretentious than many now followed. By a proper alternation of studies, two teachers should be able to present all the subjects, although, manifestly, these teachers will carry heavy loads. But on what other terms can we obtain an effective secondary education for the sparsely settled community? There are various needs to be met, of which preparation of a few students for college is not the most important. Let the small high school learn to define and meet these needs; let the makers of textbooks, manuals, and programs of secondary education realize the opportunities which are now offered to develop a more effective scheme of liberal education in the thousands of small schools in America.